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AUTHOR Abramson, Ilene Hartman
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the efforts of American social service personnel and volunteers to help the new and relatively small group of immigrants who have come from the USSR. The author suggests that three major areas must be examined before social workers can successfully help the Muscovites resettle: (1) cultural linguistics; (2) opposing value systems; and (3) application of selected principles of humanism. To illustrate the problems of acculturation, two sample conversations, taken from actual situations, are presented which deal with early adjustment to America. An accompanying analysis is based on explanations by former Russian counselees who describe their own cultural and linguistic differences. Appropriate counseling techniques are suggested to help immigrants adapt to American culture, such as using a humanistic approach and recognizing the individual's developmental stage of life. (JAC)

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Soviet Resettlement in Michigan 1974-1980:

Suggestions for Caseworkers

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CG 016297

Ilene Hartman Abramson

Two immigrants from Odessa meet on a street corner in Brooklyn. "Have you gotten set up in America yet?" asks one.

"No," replies the other, "I'm still working."[1]

PART I

Over the years, American social service personnel have helped resettle fairly large groups of refugees - Indochinese, Hungarians, Poles, Egyptians, etc. Recently, however, we have concentrated our efforts on a new and relatively small group of immigrants from the USSR. Social workers and trained volunteers have been working with the Russians since 1973. In 1980, experienced counselors still agree that "no (other) emigrés since 1930 have experienced such ... debilitating problems of ... acculturation ... differences between Soviet and American societies are enormous.[2]"

Faced with the task of assisting such a unique population, agency personnel usually react by reading the current articles about Soviet society and its impact upon the personality of the refugee. We have discovered, however, that our newly-acquired insights into modern Russia (plus some familiar guidance techniques) fail to measurably increase counselor effectiveness. Even now, after seven years of daily contact with immigrants, social workers' conversations with the refugees often result in a meaningless exchange of words; frustration is felt by both counselors and counselees.

Direct experience on both a professional and personal level have convinced this writer that three major areas must be examined before we can successfully help the Muscovite resettle:

- cultural linguistics
- opposing value systems
- application of selected principles of humanism

In order to illustrate the above, two sample conversations (taken from actual situations with Russians) have been written on the remaining pages. Both dialogues involve a fictitious Soviet immigrant, Boris Liberov, and his early adjustment to America. The interviews' accompanying analyses of linguistic misunderstandings and Soviet-American value systems are based solely upon explanations given by former Russian counselees who feel they have "made it" in the United States.

The first dialogue is between Ann Bernstein, an experienced job counselor, and Boris Liberov. Mrs. Bernstein has some background with Soviet immigrants. She read that in Russian society, an individual's entire self-concept rests upon the kind of work performed: "he feels absolutely defined by the status of his job ... in the Soviet Union, there is a wide gulf between the intelligensia - the college-educated - and the rest of the population".[3] Moreover, Mrs. Bernstein has seen how difficult it is to persuade new Russians to accept any job which does not carry the same prestige and title as the position previously held in the USSR. Finally, she and her co-workers recognize that the English translation of a Soviet job title may be misleading. For example, the name "engineer-mechanic" in Russia might not equal a university-trained engineer as we know it.

Mr. Liberov, a Muscovite, studied English for one year in Russia and appears to speak fairly well. He has been in Detroit for two months and has been looking for work. He calls himself an "engineer-mechanic", "engineer-technolog" or simply, an "engineer". However, his actual work (according to his official Soviet workbook, 'trudovaya knizhka'), shows supervision of employees and hands-on repair of small electronic devices. Mrs. Bernstein has met with Boris twice before and the two of them usually enjoy a good working relationship. Today they are speaking together in

Mrs. Bernstein's office so that she may check his general progress in Michigan. Near the end of their discussion, she will offer Mr. Liberov his first American job, a light assembly position in an electronics instrument factory. Mrs. Bernstein has carefully reviewed Boris' documents and knows that his training and experience cannot possibly qualify him for even an entry-level engineering position in the USA.

DIALOGUE

Mrs. Bernstein: Good to see you again, Mr. Liberov. Come in the office and sit down. First of all, how do you feel today?

Mr. Liberov: It's everything okay, thank you. Just a little tired from the party last night. Maybe you heard? All of our immigrants had a party at the Community Center.

Mrs. Bernstein: Come to think about it, I did hear about it. Did you and your wife have a good time?

Mr. Liberov: Very much. Almost everyone there was from the big cities and they were all educated* people. So at least we always had someone on our level--someone who could discuss theater, art museums, you know.

Mrs. Bernstein: Yes...I know...but I also think you can learn something from everyone, regardless of educational background... And do you really think that a person from a small town, let's say, is less smart than you? Do you think you can't learn anything from the man who, for example, sweeps the floors in a factory?

*see Vocabulary for explanation (p. 9, 10, 11, 12. 13.)

Mr. Liberov: You have to understand, Mrs. Bernstein, that for us, more important to have a common language. A factory worker has very narrow interests and most of his interests are vodka and flat jokes. We saw a few at the party last night. And they pretend to be who they aren't. You probably would call them snobs.*

Mrs. Bernstein: They are snobs?!

Mr. Liberov: Of course! Who do they think they are! They are simple workers but they came dressed in ties! Trying to make themselves look like engineers!

Mrs. Bernstein: What do you mean by "engineers" in this case? Maybe I don't quite understand. What does "engineer"* mean?

Mr. Liberov: "Engineer" means smart. It means the person uses his brain.

Mrs. Bernstein: Do you have many "smart" friends?

Mr. Liberov: Only this kind.

Mrs. Bernstein: Hmm...By the way, thank you for inviting me to the party. I'm sorry I couldn't be there last night. Maybe next time.

Mr. Literov: Yes, please try to come. Every Russian in Detroit knows you and it would be fun for you. You are becoming as popular* here as Brezhnev was when we were in Russia.

Mrs. Bernstein: Popular?...like Brezhnev? Well, let's get down to the business of getting you your first job. Your English is certainly good now...tell me again, please, what did you physically* do in Russia on a day-to-day basis?

Mr. Liberov: NOTHING! I was an engineer!

Mrs. Bernstein: But what did you, yourself physically do?

Mr. Liberov: I told you! I was an engineer! I had my own office. I wore a white shirt, a tie, and no glove.*

Mrs. Bernstein: Mr. Liberov, I don't care what you wore. And no job application will ask you that! Let's try again. I'm a little puzzled. Your documents say that after high school, you went to school* in Moscow...

Mr. Liberov: What are you talking about..."I went to school!" I am not a boy!

Mrs. Bernstein: I'm not saying that you're a child! I'm not even talking about your age, Mr. Liberov. It just says that part of your schooling was done in Moscow.

Mr. Liberov: Yes--my early childhood schooling was done in Moscow, sure. And after that, I went to my Technicum* for three years and then worked as an engineer.* My degree is probably equal to an American Bachelor of Science in Engineering.

Mrs. Bernstein: Just a minute, just a minute! All your papers say that you studied radio repair -- that is a good field, but we cannot call it engineering. Engineering means design, drafting, calculations...Did you do those things in Moscow?

Mr. Liberov: I worked as an engineer and I don't see why I cannot continue to do the same in the U.S.A.! Lots of my friends worked as engineers and they have the same edu-

cation and experience as I do.

Mrs. Bernstein: In any case, I can't offer you an engineering job now because I don't even have one. Here's a job in a factory in Detroit where you...

Mr. Liberov: That's a black* job! I only want a white* job!

Mrs. Bernstein: Mr. Liberov, if you are going to be happy in the United States, you should learn that we don't categorize jobs and races together! Why, that's just like the anti-semitism you left in the USSR! Black job, white job...!

Mr. Liberov: I am looking for an engineering position and I insist that you find this kind of job.

Mrs. Bernstein: Please try to listen to me...The name of this factory is Brenner Manufacturing -- it's a good company with lots of potential.

Mr. Liberov: What does Brenner mean?

Mrs. Bernstein: I don't know. Maybe it's someone's name.

Mr. Liberov: That's a crazy system. You can't tell what the company does if the name doesn't explain it to you!

Mrs. Bernstein: Whatever the name, you can at least get a start there. It is never a bad idea to go for an interview and then decide. If you're interested, I can call one of the people there, Mrs. Berger, and set up an appointment for you.

Mr. Liberov: Mrs. Berger...is she Jew?

Mrs. Bernstein: I don't know and either way, it doesn't matter. By the way, I think there are some other Russians already there.

Mr. Liberov: Who are they?

Mrs. Bernstein: I don't remember their names...let me see...

Mr. Liberov: Are they intelligent,* educated people or are they workers?*

Mrs. Bernstein: I really don't know and that shouldn't matter to you. I only know that there is a job there you could qualify for.

Mr. Liberov: How much do they pay?

Mrs. Bernstein: Six dollars an hour to start.

Mr. Liberov: My neighbor is an American engineer and he makes $10.00 an hour. And I don't think he's smarter than I am and...

Mrs. Bernstein: How do you know what he makes anyway?

Mr. Liberov: Oh, I figured it out. I asked him and I asked everyone, but no one wants to tell me.

Mrs. Bernstein: In the United States, first of all, you don't ask. It is not considered polite. And these people might have more seniority* than you. And their jobs might be different.

Mr. Liberov: What are the secrets here? We Russians all know what everyone else earns! Well, anyway, maybe I can at least go and see what the Brenner place looks like. Now, I don't say I'll take just a black worker job, though! Don't misunderstand me!

Mrs. Bernstein: You want to work as an engineer, right?

Mr. Liberov: Of course! That was my job!

Mrs. Bernstein: If you are really serious, you can be taught* fundamentals of engineering in one of our night schools or junior colleges and...

Mr. Liberov: I absolutely don't understand! How can I be taught!* I am 32 years old! Do you think I am a baby?

Mrs. Bernstein: A baby? No! Lots of people older than you can be taught new things. You should see who goes to some of these classes!

Mr. Liberov: I just don't understand!

Mrs. Bernstein: Well, I'll give you time to think everything over and then we'll talk again.

Mr. Liberov: By the way, you said you didn't have any engineering jobs here in Detroit? Maybe you know about work in a better place -- maybe New York? I can tell you true, Detroit is just a village,* not a city.

Mrs. Bernstein: No, nothing anywhere else, at least nothing today. By the way, this "village" is the fifth largest city in the United States.

Mr. Liberov: But it is a village! And my family and I will leave it one day for a real city. Until then, we'll just have to suffer here. Remember, Mrs. Bernstein, you can call me during the day or in the evening...Anyway, you are an official* so I know if you want to, you can put me in an engineering job as a thinker man.* Good-bye for now.

VOCABULARY

(as explained by V.N., a radio engineer from Minsk)

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educated people - "These are people who graduated from the university and who developed themselves in etiquette and who read a lot... they are interested in arts, music, philosophy...there is now a Renaissance of the old aristocracy what historically aspired to acquire knowledge...today, even if you have money in Russia, you can't spend it on anything...nothing to buy, so only thing left for kind of dignity is your knowledge and professional title... the way of life is to live along with fine arts and to be more similar to old aristocracy, but with contemporary approach."

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snobs - (closest English translation to Russian understanding) - "According to Soviet etiquette, only people in certain occupations can wear ties...only the aristocratic class wore ties and the contemporary aristocracy is the same...manual workers have no business with ties...just out of place."

engineer - "Before going into university itself, a (pre-engineering) student must pass from five to six tests (two math, one physics, one literature, one foreign language, and/or one chemistry)... once in the university, you must study only professional courses for five to six years...title 'engineer' brings great dignity for Russian people."

popular - "Well known; not have to be well liked for Russian understanding."

physically - "Russian translation only means 'manually'...for factory workers...engineers work with brain, pens, not physical."

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white shirt, tie, glove - "Glove is sign of manual laborer...others are signs of engineer and therefore part of modern aristocracy."

school - "A term only for children in Russian...cannot possibly be a place for adults."

technicum - "Like a junior college."

worked as an engineer - "We have special system...you are boss of a factory and you have orders from the local City Communist Party Industry Department to fulfill a certain plan...you as the boss must find people to do this plan right...you need these people for your factory:

Three Senior Engineers (University graduates)	Two will earn about $130 a month and one will make $140-$150
Two Engineers (University graduates)	Earn about $110-$120 a month
Five Technicians (Technical college graduates - have some technical skill)	Earn $85 to $110 a month
One Hundred Twenty Manual Workers (did not graduate from anything)	Earn according to amount produced but not over $250 a month

Remember that this factory boss has to find someone who will work very hard to make the plan...his engineers have the skill but for their salary, they will not do this very hard job...so the boss hires a technician who would normally make $85-$110...he hires this technicum graduate to do the hard job and pays him like an engineer... maybe $120 a month...and what's more, this technician will have

the title and dignity of 'engineer'."

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black job - "Manual job...for people in factories (absolute no racial implications)...person has to change his clothing (before and after work) or else he will not be allowed to public transportation and to public places.

white job - "For engineers, doctors...opposite of 'black job'...a person who comes in and comes out with no clothing change."

intelligent - "Like 'educated', means inteiligensia for you...refers to your circle, your level."

workers - "Manual workers" (term does not refer to diligent, industrious people).

seniority - "This concept is out of Russian understanding...and anyway, salaries...are public knowledge...it is nothing for us to ask each other."

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teach (taught) - "For Russian understanding, only children can be taught... it means you force them, lead them...for adults you say 'insruct'... this means you decide to take or not to take the information given by the instructor."

village - "We judge a place according to its culture and appearance... a city, for Russian understanding, cannot have a cultural center separate from the residential area...must be all mixed together... here...no one lives next to Renaissance Center and also, in Detroit we see private houses but in Russia, only in country area."

official - "An influential person who has connections...might be kind of dummy...the official is usually a Communist Party Member, has no more than the high school education, and is...often an informer to the KGB...[official] works in an organization and has an access to the government information (not necessarily secret). Soviet people who work in the Personnel Department of any organization are informed about the employment opportunities (considered government information) within that organization and nobody else can know except the Department Managers and Board of Directors. To get a job in the USSR, you go to the Personnel Department of the organization you want to work for...[that] is what it is the official in the Soviet Personnel Department; he is obliged to take care of you, but anyway, he is an official so you must demand from him.

When Soviet people come to the USA, they look to the employees of an employment agency as to the employees from the personnel department of the Soviet organizations; they [Soviets] know that their good future in America depends on the employees of these agencies...as people in whose hands there is information and ability to place you on jobs.

Remember that in Russia, people find jobs through personal connections (in addition to organization officials)...in fact, people usually don't go to the personnel department...but when these people are new in the USA and away from their friends, their American job counselor is the first and only person they can hang on to...so American job counselor very important for two reasons -

only he has the necessary information and in a way, he replaces your Soviet friends and personal connections."

thinker man - "Uses head and not hands...like aristocracy, like engineers."

SOVIET - AMERICAN ATTITUDES

Let us try to imagine that experienced counselors like Mrs. Bernstein enrolled in a crash course (i.e. "Soviet Definitions of English Terminology") and were therefore alerted to the cultural-linguistic misunderstandings described in the preceeding pages. This new knowledge would unquestionably assist the immigrants' caseworker in comprehending new Russians. However, even when combined with an extensive social work background, an understanding of vocabulary cannot drastically improve the helping relationship; another more subtle factor enters into the situation.

There is a basic philosophical difference between Russians and Americans. The United States concerns itself with the individual and his right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness - and the intrinsic right to privacy. The USSR is based upon collectivism; survival of the group takes precedence over the survival of the individual. In the first dialogue, one feels that Boris and Mrs. Bernstein are either unaware of this concept or choose to ignore it. The counselor's abrupt "you don't ask here" causes the Russian considerable discomfort. Frustrated, he explodes and demands "what are the secrets here?"

A second cause of animosity again stems from our two conflicting value systems and the speakers' failure to recognize (and later evaluate) the

points of contention. According to V.N. (see Vocabulary), "(Russian) way of life is to be more similar to the old aristocracy." However, "Americans are impatient with ceremony...which they view with suspicion as a dubious relic of monarchist days when there were rigid social distinctions between people."[4] At first, one might say that all Europeans tend to be more class conscious than their American neighbors. It is important to remember, however, that the Soviet Union cannot be compared with other nations, even those in Eastern Europe. M.N., a film director from the USSR, states that "Americans think that refugees from Hungary, Poland, and the Soviet Union are all the same... you (they) are wrong...we Soviets are not like the Eastern Europeans...we have had fifty-seven years of...brainwashing...we are from another planet."[5] Forbidden to read most foreign literature, deprived of the opportunity to travel freely, unable to purchase common consumer goods taken for granted in other countries, and above all, oppressed by a totalitarian system, the modern Soviet preserved his sanity by turning again to his culture (the old aristocracy) and professional status. He relied on these interrelated elements during a time of stress. They were his raison d'être and together provided the sole emotional ammunition against a hostile environment.

It follows that immigration, perhaps the most tragic experience of a lifetime, pushes the Soviet to depend even more heavily upon familiar cultural traits and traditions: the spirit of collectivism, the study of the fine arts, and the almost sacred occupational title. It is therefore devastating for a newly-arrived Muscovite to hear from well-meaning Americans that the kind of job and/or social position "doesn't matter here". Such statements, if heard constantly, can only increase the refugee's hostility toward us who apparently want to strip him of his self-identity. Inability to "find" oneself leads to an overall maladjustment, the evidence of which can

be seen here in the Russian communities - a rather high incidence of alcoholism (as compared to other immigrant Jewish communities) and divorce among newly-resettled couples.

As counselors, we would be naive to assume that our influence could greatly increase or decrease the pain experienced during the migration of any people. It is necessary, however, to avoid an unintentional aggravation of an already unhappy situation. For example, on page 7 of the Dialogue, Mrs. Bernstein's response to Mr. Liberov's question, "are they intelligent, educated people or are they workers," could have been as follows:

> "I'm not even sure and I never thought about it. I am told that in Russia, there is a big difference between factory workers and - let's say - teachers. Did I understand correctly or am I wrong?" (Pause and let Mr. Liberov answer) "It might seem strange to you because you're still new in this country, but Americans, as a whole, never seem to think that much about a person's job title... I guess that might be because our culture is a little different and emphasizes different things...I think it all sounds crazy to you now - it has to - but in time, as you live here, you'll see things for yourself."

Instead of dismissing Mr. Liberov's question - and therefore Mr. Liberov - with an abrupt "that shouldn't matter to you," Mrs. Bernstein now tries to acknowledge her counselee's feelings. She displays an interest in his value system and therefore, in him as a person. Furthermore, in the suggested response written above, Mrs. Bernstein also shows sensitivity

by openly recognizing the existence of culture shock: "I know it all sounds crazy to you." The foreign national's feelings of uprootedness remain but become somewhat easier for him to bear because another individual made an honest attempt to see these emotions and understand their causes.

Russian and American value systems will always be deeply ingrained and often in conflict. However, with the help of an empathetic and trustworthy Ameican listener, the Soviet immigrant will feel looked upon as an entire human being - different, but no less worthy. His own culture respected, he will gradually become more open to learning about ours. In turn, the entire readjustment period (which includes language acquisition and often, professional re-training) might appear less difficult.

PART II

Unfortunately, many helping professionals renounce their efforts after a few frustrating conversations (similar to that depicted in Dialogue I). Caseworkers, irritated by the Russians' attitudes and mannerisms, begin to avoid further explanations of cultural differences and the like because such discussions usually result in further annoyance. Finally, we erroneously reassure ourselves that in the end, all the Mr. Liberovs will suddenly "know" how to present themselves to an employer (even though they failed to do so in the more protected environment of a counselor's office).

The second dialogue between Boris and Mrs. Berger of Brenner Manufacturing illustrates the above. With Mr. Liberov's knowledge and approval, Mrs. Bernstein arranged the following interview with Mrs. Berger. The counselor carefully detailed the company's current openings (light assembly), benefit package, and chances for advancement. Finally, long before this appointment, Mrs. Bernstein told Boris that he does not merit the title "engineer" in the United States.

Per Mrs. Berger's request, Boris will go to the appointment alone.

DIALOGUE

Mrs. Berger: How do you do, Mr. Liberov? Doris Berger's my name. Please have a seat.

Mr. Liberov: I am glad to know you.

Mrs. Berger: I have a little information about you already from your job counselor and...

Mr. Liberov: (interrupts) - I'm sorry, what is your position?

Mrs. Berger: I'm the personnel manager. Now, let's talk about you. You're a Russian Jewish immigrant, right?

Mr. Liberov: How I can be Russian Jew?* I was Jew in Russia and here everyone tells I am Russian or Russian Jew! No one this understand!

Mrs. Berger: Well...excuse me. I did not mean to offend...Now, how do you like the USA so far?

Mr. Liberov: What can I say? I am only here for three months!

Mrs. Berger: You live in Oak Park and you are helped by a lot of volunteers, right? I hear they do a marvelous job teaching English to all the newcomers.

Mrs. Liberov: Straight from the kitchen! Those are volunteers.

Mrs. Berger: Hang on! Please, Mr. Liberov! When people came to this country from Poland thirty-five years ago, no one helped! Now there's such a thing as gratitude.

Mr. Liberov: But volunteers can't help anyone!

Mrs. Berger: Well, one day we'll talk more about it but now, down to business. Mrs. Bernstein called me last Friday and said you would be coming here for a position. She said you were a radio technician, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Liberov: No, no - I told Mrs. Bernstein that I am engineer. Maybe do you have engineering position for me?

Mrs. Berger: Well, let me find out some things myself. What did you do in Russia?

*see Vocabulary for explanation (p. 20, 21)

Mr. Liberov: I engineered the technological processes of the radio assembly division. I was supervisor of twelve employees and was also chief in exploitation.* I am expert.

Mrs. Berger: Can you read an electronic schematic?

Mr. Liberov: Of course!*

Mrs. Berger: Can you draft?*

Mr. Liberov: Did you ever see an engineer who couldn't draft?

Mrs. Berger: YES! Now, let's give you a chance to prove yourself a little. Here is a basic draft of a control system. Let me see you detail this part for me.

Mr. Liberov: (Folds his arms) - Give me an engineering job and I'll show what I can!

Mrs. Berger: I'm afraid you have a lot more to learn than drafting. By the way, we don't have any engineering openings, now, only assembly and...

Mr. Liberov: Assembly* not job.

Mrs. Berger: And even if you qualified for engineering, we would only start you in a lower position. You would need more English; otherwise you'd never be able to communicate with anyone from the other departments.

Mr. Liberov: Language* never mind. Who is your supervisor?

Mrs. Berger: My supervisor is Mr. Johnstone. Now good-bye and good luck.

After this appointment, Mrs. Bernstein telephoned Mr. Liberov to discuss the outcome of this interview. Mr. Liberov stated that Mrs. Berger had no job for him and that Mrs. Bernstein should try harder.

It should be noted that Bori although still unemployed, showed no signs of being upset. For a new immigrant, American caseworkers naturally bear the same paternalistic responsibilities as the bureaucrats did in the USSR. These "officials" are all alike in Boris' mind. They must see to his basic needs - housing, employment, etc. Therefore, he sees no cause for concern; he will "get job".

VOCABULARY

(as explained by A.B., an architect from Leningrad)

Page 17

Russian/Jew - "Soviet people understand these two as ethnic groups and your ethnic group (which was religion before the 1917-October Revolution) is written on your passport...[everyone] has internal passport after age 16...'Jew' has nothing to do with religion. That (religion) is prohibited and separated from the State by the Constitution. Americans are wrong to think that real Jewish people are coming out of Russia...those are Soviet people."

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exploitation - "Sounds like Russian word which means 'to operate or to utilize'."

of course - "We use very often, not intended to be bad in Russian language; has a meaning of the affirmative strength."

draft - "During the last three years of high school, you are learning drafting...technical technicum, which is like junior college,

requires drafting...question 'can you draft' is like if you are a driver and someone asks you if you know how to insert key in ignition...very insulting question.

assembly - "Takes some kind of learning for twenty minutes; job for monkey...not creative type of job."

language - Many people cannot - just cannot understand what is language problem in job because ability to work is on the top. I don't need to talk to anyone in another department like here...my Russian supervisor will do all this correspondence, otherwise it is anarchy...the Soviet system is called 'centralized supervision'."

SOVIET - AMERICAN ATTITUDES

As in Dialogue I, Dialogue II, contains fairly obvious cross-cultural misunderstandings, some of which could have been clarified with a few extra language lessons. However, even if his English had improved, Boris' mannerisms and basic attitudes would have predominated in the mind of Mrs. Berger. Mr. Liberov did not - could not - "Americanize" in time for the job interview.

One of the first areas to be examined in the preceeding conversations is the overall style of the interview. It appears as if Boris tries to "take over" and almost assume the role of the interviewer: "I'm sorry, what is your position?" "Who is your supervisor?" This attitude is the rule in the USSR. B.D., a nurse from Kiev, explains the system:

"Interview - is a meeting of both sides in equal positions...

company representative should be in a position to answer the questions of the potential employee, as much as the employee has to answer the representative's questions...discussion should be open - one is selling, another is buying...if...the salesperson (company representative) cannot determine the product's condition (applicant's abilities), and its value no one buyer would talk to him...but if the company uses somone (not in a position to actually make the offer) to screen me, that company is giving me false things...[if] boss sends his representative to interview me, I will send my representative to that interview with my documents! This, for us, is...very dishonest game...so we want to know right away who we're talking to."

American counselors, somewhat cognizant of the numerous cultural differences, might try to prepare a counselee to be "more polite" in an interview. The Mrs. Bernsteins again ignore, however, a fundamental truth: adults cannot be verbally "domesticated" and/or adopted to a new society within a few weeks. For many months or even years, Mr. Liberov will view his caseworker as an uneducated but powerful person who can - and should - determine the result of any job-related appointment.

In addition to inappropriate interview conduct, we again see some basic values (disdain for volunteers and a seemingly lackadaisical approach to any work) which easily offend Americans. As in Dialogue I, these attitudes are especially repugnant because they directly oppose our own. The first concept, volunteerism, is completely alien to Russians. "Straight from the kitchen!" C.A. a bookkeeper from Odessa, describes the Soviet reasoning:

"We don't respect volunteers in the professional field because in this case, the volunteer is becoming an amateur; the person who can't carry the responsibility for his doing; he could have been thrown away from his job. I would not trust my children to the volunteer because he is not responsible person... [volunteer] work goes to housewives without ability to do anything...we can't even imagine in what other sense a volunteer could be because in all other things, friends help; we're more dependent on each other."

Our incomprehensible volunteer spirit, flatly rejected by Soviet people, is however, a "deeply-rooted American trait...which goes back to pioneer days when barn-raisings and cabin-roofings were accomplished...by... combined efforts of friends and neighbors."[6] Mr. Liberov, a man with a totally different cultural background and a lifetime of Soviet experience, cannot respond with "gratitude." Our expectations are, in a sense, unrealistic; he is not guilty.

An even stronger point of contention, however, centers upon the two societies' conflicting attitudes toward work itself. After his appointment at Brenner, Boris remains unemployed - and calm. Mrs. Bernstein, an American raised with the Protestant work ethic interprets Boris' reaction as laziness. Moreover, his request that the counselor take responsibility of his job shows the counselor his immaturity and passivity. In the United States, "the non-worker is regarded with a certain scorn based, perhaps, on the conviction that in pioneer days, he would not have survived...by tradition, by training...Americans are problem solvers...a problem solver is an achiever."[7] Boris, although Soviet, is nevertheless condemned for his

inability to conform to our standards; he is a non-doer. Disgusted, Mrs. Bernstein writes in her case records that Boris seems "disinterested in gainful employment and dangerously overdependent upon helping professionals."

Her case notes are not entirely inaccurate. Boris genuinely does not want to work, except on his own terms. L.L., a jeweler from Minsk, delineates these necessary conditions:

> "When people don't work, it's because they don't like the job available or they don't want to work for someone...Soviet idea about job is to make life more enjoyable and to give possibility to buy more comforts...but the type of job is more important to us...better to wait - for many Russians - for a job in your profession...There are two kinds of people: professionals who want to wait for job in their professions and people who were black marketeers over there and who want to go into business here. They think business here is the same but they are wrong... harder here. No shame to be non-worker...we were given everything from the government in Russia; [we] don't feel your shame from it."

The ideas expressed above, although alien to many of us, are perfectly logical to a Soviet. Moreover, a Russian feels that when necessary, he will get any job within a day or so because this was possible in the USSR. It should be remembered that the immigrants bring the "natural Russian tendency [reinforced by isolation] to believe that other countries are really quite like their own."[8]

Americans might try to comprehend this insularity resulting from an oppressive totalitarian government. We may begin to understand the Soviet's attitude toward work, volunteerism, professional status, and col-

lectivism. In the end, we can approve or disapprove of these traits but above all, we must acknowledge that they are there.

Given such a situation, we begin to question counseling techniques which might have proved efficacious with Americans or even with persons from different countries. Examination of certain principles of humanism offers some possible answers:

1. "The facilitator [counselor] sets the initial mood or climate of the group or class experience."[9] When speaking with an individual from another culture, follow his reactions and above all, listen to him. Try to avoid forming opinions based on reactions to the immigrant's statements or behavior. When a phrase or attitudinal pattern appears offensive, inappropriate, or simply incomprehensible, immediately stop and interject:

   "There is something I can't understand here. How do you understand the word 'official'? How did an official influence the situation in Russia?" (Stop and let the person answer). Continue with "Now you've taught me - thank you - I guess it's only natural that coming from another society, you look at me as the same kind of official. I'll try to explain how the system works here. It might not make a lot of sense because you're new to the country, but what sounds strange now will possibly be clearer as time goes on."

Professional and personal experience have shown this questioning

method to be qu e useful. In so doing, the facilitator acknowledges the Russian's "accumulation of a unique set of life experiences"[10] and sets the initial mood of mutual respect. The counselor expresses a genuine interest in the person, she speaks with, not at, the immigrant. With this fundamental element, our future efforts will most likely be more productive.

2. "An adult's readiness to learn is linked to the developmental tasks unique to a stage in life."[11] Caseworkers involved with Russian immigrants often lament the fact that their counselees "just won't listen...no matter how we explain the situation here, they turn around and do it their Soviet way... and they fall on their faces and come back demanding from us." This writer would recommend a pragmatic approach. Counselors are obliged to "set the initial mood", to offer suggestions about American life and, in particular, about the job hunting process here. It must be remembered, however, that no one can domesticate the Soviet - or any other adult. A Russian should be reminded that data will always be provided but that we realize that he, an adult, will take it when (and if) he sees fit.

More often than not, the Muscovite, with his "unique set of life experiences," comes to Detroit and tries to re-establish the familiar Russian system here. However, after a series of unsuccessful job interviews, perhaps a business which failed, and some months living from money lent by local relatives, the Mr. Liberovs begin to see that this country really is different, that language does count, and that "any" gainful work cannot be found overnight. Some (not all) immigrants then come to the point of re-examining the advice given perhaps a year earlier.

CONCLUSION

In summary, a part of Mrs. Bernstein occasionally exists in every helping professional. As human beings, we have certain ingrained cultural values and disapprove (consciously or unconsciously) of the person who seems to challenge them. Furthermore, the media informs us daily of rising unemployment among native born Americans, especially in Michigan. Are the Soviets more trouble than they are worth?

The last four decades answer this question. Since 1933, the United States has accepted refugees from totalitarian countries. Like Mr. Liberov, many were professionals or semi-professionals with extensive training and experience. The impact of these persons on our scientific research, medical system, the arts - in short, on every field of human endeavor - is immeasurable. Moreover, it can be said that immigrants carry at least part of the responsibility for America's advancement over the last forty years.

Perhaps Lenore Parker, Executive Director of the American Council for Emigres in the Profession (ACEP), best expresses the current philosophy among caseworkers, teachers, and volunteers: "There is every reason to believe that the Soviets come with the same gifts...the Russians bring determination as well as talent...they come by their own admission to another planet. With help, they will enrich it."[12]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Ken Brill, "Who Was That Comrade I Saw You With Last Night?", Present Tense, Volume 7, Number 7, (Winter 1980), 7.

[2]Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism: Soviet Emigrés, Bewildered by Contracting Lifestyles," The Journal of Philanthropy, Volume 17, Number 5 (September-October 1976), 39.

[3]Ibid., p. 39-40.

[4]Arthur Gordon, A Guide to Two Cultures - American..., (Washington, 1978), p. 10.

[5]Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism: Soviet Emigrés, Bewildered by Contrasting Lifestyles," The Journal of Philanthropy, Volume 17, Number 5, (September-October 1976), 38.

[6]Arthur Gordon, "A Guide to Two Cultures - American..., (Washington, 1978), p. 17.

[7]Ibid., p. 6-7.

[8]Robert Kaiser, Russia: The People and the Power (Brattleboro, 1975), p. 267-268.

[9]John L. Elias and Sharan Merriam, Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education (Huntington, 1980), p. 125.

[10]Ibid., p. 132.

[11]Ibid., p. 133.

[12]Lenore Parker, "From Paternalism to Pluralism: Soviet Emigrés Bewildered by Contrasting Lifestyles," The Journal of Philanthropy, Volume 17, Number 5 (September-October 1976), p. 43.